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ABSTRACT

For 3 years, Texas A and M University Kingsville (formerly Texas A and I University) has provided a basic oral interpretation course for teachers specializing in reading on the elementary level. After teaching the course once, the instructor decided to adapt the course to the needs of the students by using children's literature instead of adult literature for the performance assignments and emphasizing practical performance skills more and theory less. The course has become a service course whose goal is to stimulate the future teacher's interest in basic techniques of analysis and performance. The first few classes of the semester are a half-and-half mixture of lecture and reading lab. During the reading class, the instructor concentrates on vocal techniques while referring to points made in the appropriate text chapter. Performances from the text follow after discussion of the practical aspects of integrating the vocal and physical requirements. The instructor uses video modeling at this point. As the semester continues, students continue with performances of prose and poetry. The final assignment involves them in a group performance of some combination of prose, poetry, or drama. The final goal is to prepare these reading majors to be good models of classroom performance who will encourage an appreciation of literature in their students. (RS)

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Teaching Oral Interpretation: A Reading Specialization Perspective

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

I will be sharing with you the reasons why I think one should consider the advantages of adapting the beginning oral interpretation course to the needs of a specialized student population and I will briefly explain how I have adapted the course and the result of those changes. Let me note that this topic did not flash into my consciousness in a random bit of inspiration suitable for a possible convention paper but was the result of several recent classroom experiences.

Perhaps a bit of background is in order at this point. Texas A&I University (to become Texas A&M-Kingsville as of September 1) is a state-supported campus that offers a comprehensive academic program. Our campus population of over six thousand is mostly on the bachelor's level. Our department basic courses serve the needs of all the other colleges to some degree or another. Our school of education is one of the few in Texas to determine that the speech communication is an important force in the classroom and that the speech needs of the teachers at the elementary level are not the same as those at the secondary levels. As a result we have one course designed to serve the future elementary teacher and another course for the secondary teacher. As a part of this rethinking in the education department, it was also decided that those specializing in reading needed other related speech courses. So, for the past three years our department has been providing a basic oral interpretation course for these teachers who will be teaching

reading on the elementary level. If your department would like to expand your service offerings, you might explore a similar idea on your campus.

After teaching oral interpretation for the first time to future elementary teachers, I felt less than satisfied that the course had met their career needs adequately. After some analysis I came to the conclusion that their needs were not the needs of those whom we would normally serve. At that point I decided to adapt the course more to their needs by using children's literature instead of adult literature for the performance assignments and adding more emphasis on practical performance skills and less on theory. After the second time I felt satisfied that the future teachers had gotten more usable information from the course than those before. I continue to believe this.

Of course the concept of adapting to a campus need is not new to us since the practice of focusing the basic public speaking course to serve the needs of those in the pre-professional areas is common. Here again, there would be limits on the need for adapting any course, but I suggest that individual situations demand individual solutions. What might be appropriate for one school would be inappropriate for another. In our particular situation most of our future elementary reading teachers will most likely go directly into the classroom and some will return later for a graduate degree in education.

Almost none will go further than that.

I know that some would argue that adapting any course lessens the intellectual rigor of a discipline but that point is, I contend, arguable depending on what should be the primary reason to adapt any course: the benefit of the students. Any course and especially service courses must be useful and be positive experiences. This is the only oral interpretation these students will ever have so it should be linked as much as possible to their needs.

I suppose it goes without saying that few of these students have much appreciation for literature except for that encountered in sophomore English and the Children's Literature course offered in the English department. The result is that the authors so often referred to in our oral interpretation texts are foreign to these students who simply have little or no literary background or appreciation for the likes of Plath, Dylan Thomas, James Joyce or Singer.

Another factor to be considered is that there are no textbooks in oral interpretation suitable to this particular audience. I contend that the fact is that oral interpretation textbooks during the past twenty years have become more and more theoretical and have displaced the art of performance with studies of what is more akin to literary criticism. Some would again argue that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" to which one could reply that oral interpretation, at the undergraduate

level, is "broke" and does need revitalizing through a return to an emphasis on the development of performance skills. I make that assertion based on the obvious fact that there are so few oral interpretation texts printed today as compared with twenty years ago. Demand has clearly changed for some reason.

What should be the goal of the oral interpretation course at your school is a vital concern of us all but in this instance my course has become a service course whose goal is to stimulate the future teacher's interest in basic techniques of analysis and performance. Interesting enough, some of these future teachers do quite well in both areas. So clearly this course is aimed at using oral performance of children's prose and poetry to ultimately stimulate interest in both silent and oral reading by elementary students.

For the purpose of knowing something about the reading skills my reading majors are bringing with them I mix the first few classes of the semester with a half and half mixture of lecture and reading lab. The text I use for the reading lab is the paperback of Little House on the Prairie and I assign pages for the next class. During the reading in class I try to concentrate on vocal techniques while referring to points made in the appropriate text chapter. We sit and read very informally at this point. This soon leads to a performance from the text after we have discussed the practical aspects of integrating the vocal and physical requirements. I use quite

a bit of video modeling at this point. As the semester continues they continue with performances of prose of their choosing, followed by a performance of poetry for children and another performance combining both prose and poetry. The final assignment involves them in some form of group performance of some combination of prose, poetry or drama. Naturally they are guided to select materials written by contemporary authors whose works have been published in state-approved language arts textbooks or that have won literary awards or wide public approval. Here again, I want to stress the final goal is to prepare these reading majors to be good models of classroom performance who will encourage an appreciation of literature in their students.

Let me close thanking you for your interest and encouraging you to experiment with adapting the oral interpretation course for a specialized group.